

**TOP SECRET**

COR 1529

Copy 10 of 10

**NRO REVIEW COMPLETED**

**PROJECT CORONA CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS**

**FY-63 - FY-64**

The CORONA program provides aerial reconnaissance in support of national intelligence objectives. The system used to acquire this reconnaissance employs a two stage earth-circling satellite vehicle, the first stage being a THOR boost and the second stage a Lockheed AGENA Engine. There is a recoverable nose cone portion carried that returns exposed camera film to the earth's surface for intelligence photo exploitation.

1. Successful recoveries of CORONA payloads during the past year confirm the importance of the contributions Project CORONA has made to the nation's intelligence posture.
2. To date approximately 67% of the Soviet Union and China has been photographed where the cloud coverage has been Category II (clear to 2/8 cloud coverage). Of prime importance has been the discovery of new ICBM sites and the monitoring of previously known sites. In addition, information on the status of the MRBM and SAM posture in the Soviet Defense picture has greatly enhanced our ability to estimate Soviet capabilities.
3. Photography taken of China has been most valuable in helping us determine the current capabilities of the Chinese Communist Armed Forces.
4. In view of the successful CORONA missions it is imperative that this program be declared operational. With this declaration many factors used during the research and development phase must be replaced by sound operational concepts.
5. To best serve the national interest the scheduling of CORONA missions must be given increased flexibility not previously available during the R&D phase of the program. It may be necessary to cancel a scheduled launch following a successful recovery to

**TOP SECRET**

TOP SECRET

provide the Intelligence Community sufficient time to digest the information obtained. Future schedules should have enough latitude in them to allow launchings to be based on the primary requirement of national need.

6. If the CORONA project has a role in the National Emergency War Plan, there are in existence operational procedures that could meet the requirement.

7. The two CORONA missions scheduled to launch in September and October of this year have been removed from the schedule. In addition the four launchings scheduled for November and December 1962 have also been eliminated. These missions have been removed due to funding and informal discussions on this subject indicates they will be replaced in the Fiscal Year 1963.

8. In addition to the CORONA program DPD is also engaged in certain operational activities of the ARGON program. This program uses the same satellite vehicle and launch boost as the CORONA program and carries a film payload which is also recoverable. The primary mission of the ARGON vehicle is for geodetic survey purposes, not as an intelligence gathering device. By charter agreement, DPD provides operational reports control procedures, Headquarters control room R&D assistance, PIC facilities, [REDACTED] communications, and obtains necessary political approval for ARGON missions. Vital field support is also provided.

NRO  
25X1

9. There have been four unsuccessful attempts to complete an ARGON mission to date. Four additional missions are scheduled to be launched between now and November 1962. Funding for two additional instruments has been provided bringing to six the total number of ARGON missions scheduled in Calendar Year 1962.

10. The CORONA/ARGON programs being operated as joint programs with other government agencies cannot be clearly stated in terms of operational concepts. Many actions in these programs are dependent upon decisions made at a very high government level and as a result it is impossible to predict future funding requirements or advance additional operational concepts.

TOP SECRET